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FSA*Now*

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Woods Talks Growth, Resignation

At the All Hands meeting on May 15, Greg Woods discussed his resignation from FSA, the amazing accomplishments we have made since the transition to the PBO and the great things we will do together in the days to come.

Greg said he will resign at the end of September this year to focus his energy on battling pancreatic cancer.

"I am eager to do this. I am optimistic about this. I feel good about the people involved. I'm pretty sure God isn't done with me," Greg said. He later said, "I made this decision that I should resign and devote my energy to living now that I have so much to live for."

Despite his departure, Greg referred to his "unshakable faith" in the staff of FSA to solve any problem and to continue the amazing progress



Greg Woods talks about FSA's progress at the May All-Hands meeting.

set in motion only a few years ago. According to Greg, there's a lot to look forward to at FSA, such as the new COD system and Consistent Answers.

"You're on an absolute roll and I'm absolutely cer-

*Please see **WOODS**, next page*

Say Goodbye to Paper: ERM Team Moves Forward

FSA is on its way to becoming the first paperless federal agency. The electronic records management (ERM) team is converting stored paper documents into electronic images that can easily be accessed via the Internet. This process will remove huge amounts of stored paper and will increase productivity. The ERM initiative is one of the operating measures put in place by the Department's Management Improvement Team and helps FSA become a leader in managing federal records.

The ERM project has already successfully turned all of Case Management and Oversight's Document Receipt and Control Center's three million paper documents into electronic images. Case Management staff is thrilled with the results. One staff member said, "The system is easy

to use and, boom, your documents are right there!" "We don't have to wait for documents anymore — it's great," said another.

Phase two of the ERM project is starting to image new incoming paper and convert the paper documents currently stored by the regional Case Management offices, Administrative Action and Appeals, and all of Financial Partners. Phase two will also include the design of an FSA-wide database that will centralize the management of electronic records.

"Our goal is to advance the imaging solution and become consistent with Federal records management standards that allow for the disposal and destruction of paper records. Disposal of the paper is the key to our success," said Cheryl Queen, FSA project manager for ERM.

Woods Urges Continued Success

Continued from page one



tain that you're going to keep on rolling," Greg said. "At this point, you're kind of hooked on the idea of customers. You're hooked on the idea of the success. You're high on the applause and the appreciation we now get."

Since the initial transition to the PBO, Greg said there are many things that FSA is "better at" than before, such as customer service, customer satisfaction and employee satisfaction, which has gone "from the bottom of the heap

in government to the top."

"You guys have the magic decoder rings to deal with the problems and issues that come up," he said. "With all that, I know that the program will keep on moving. And because I know that, it lets me move on."

In terms of specific accomplishments, Greg noted award-winning products such as FAFSA on the Web, e-signatures on promissory notes, the Direct Loan Servicing site and many other amazing achievements FSA has put together as a team.

"We've built the model of how government ought to work," Greg said. "And that model will continue in you."

Consistent Data Has Clear Vision for Future

The Consistent Data team has taken a major step toward helping FSA reach its promise of delivering consistent answers to its internal and external customers. Today, in many cases, information provided by one FSA system is not consistent with that obtained from another system. This is because clear ownership of the data is not established, and data can be entered and updated in many different systems leading to multiple entries for one student.

"The Consistent Data Initiative allowed us to identify in a structured manner where the official sources of data should be and enabled us to produce a roadmap for getting the data in our systems aligned to our target vision," said Paul Hill, senior technical advisor for Title IV delivery.

FSA's business and modernization partners joined the Consistent Data team to create this roadmap. The roadmap addresses several of the causes of inconsistent data and depicts a vision for clear data ownership and usage. In addition to the roadmap, a high-level system overview of FSA's numerous and complex primary data systems was developed. A data dictionary was also developed and is being made available for use by all channels to assist in modernization activities. The data dictionary is a resource that provides information about FSA's shared data systems such as Common Origination and Disbursement (COD), Central Processing Systems (CPS) and the Financial Partners' data mart.

With the Consistent Data project, FSA can now better serve our customers by delivering consistent answers.

Spotlight on... *National Default Prevention Day*

On Aug. 1, FSA will host National Default Prevention Day, a series of conferences intended to provide training for schools on best practices for reducing the number of defaulted loans.

Simultaneous conferences will be held at each FSA regional office and in our Washington and Puerto Rico offices. The conferences will feature programs customized for each region, such as "Consumer Credit Planning," which introduces financial management skills that schools can teach students. School representatives will also hear from other institutions in their region that have successfully reduced the percentage of defaulted loans among their students.

Last year's NDPD conferences hosted over 1150 participants, three-fourths of which were representatives from schools.



Ninety percent of those who attended said in a survey that they thought NDPD should become an annual event. Attendees of this year's conference will receive an individualized report that shows their school's standing in comparison to other similar schools and where the school could be if it reduced its number of defaults.

"We hope to make schools aware that default prevention is not rocket science — a lot of it is good common sense," says Ron Selepak, who works in the Direct Loans school relations office and is helping to organize NDPD. "We want to convince the financial aid directors that these are the things that are important in how you can reduce your defaults."

FSA Now

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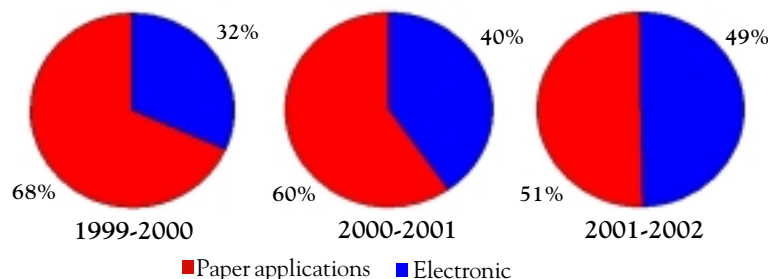
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FSA Now is monthly newsletter for FSA staff and operating partners available on FSANet. To share feedback or contribute ideas, email FSA Communications, or contact Lisa Cain at (202) 377-4003.

FAFSA on the Web Success

In the past three years, the FAFSA on the Web team has encouraged more and more students to apply for financial aid electronically — increasing the number of electronic applications by nearly 20 percent. This year, they've already hit the 3 million mark — providing better service to customers by making applying for financial aid more efficient and cost effective.



Chicago Team Pursues Manager Excellence

In response to Secretary Paige's push to create a "culture of accountability," Chicago regional managers from FSA participated in Manager Excellence training on April 3.

The sessions were designed to help enhance managers' performance using accountability and results techniques. Accountability includes better communication, Department unity, high expectations, employee development, measuring successes and weaknesses and focusing on the Department's strategic goals.

"Managers learned how to help staff be more accountable for organizational goals," said Diane Spadoni, Chicago regional director.

"We want managers to think about leadership, results and alignment," said Bill Ryan, associate director of FSA University. "The very context of our work is different now that we are a PBO, and while some managers may have been getting it exactly right all along, for others, including me, there is a process of rethinking, relearning, adjusting and improving that has to go on, and the Manager Excellence pro-

gram is designed to support that."

Motivating FSA staff to embody accountability and program excellence reinforces strengthening customer service, employee satisfaction and program integrity. Accountability empowers staff to take an active role in FSA by not just uniting the staff but galvanizing the creative energy of a team focused on achieving organizational goals.

"We were encouraged to strive for performance excellence, which is the result achieved when we hold ourselves accountable for managing for results," she said of her experience in the program. "The training helped solidify what we should have been doing all along."

Since April, news of Chicago's success has spread to other regions. According to Bill, more than 50 managers in DC, Chicago and San Francisco have participated in the Manager Excellence training thus far. A Chicago pilot was held on February 28 and DC sessions were held on April 18 and May 23. Case Management and Oversight managers were trained in San Francisco on May

15 and 16. A June 26 session is scheduled for managers in Atlanta.

Senior leaders interested in scheduling a discussion about performance or a team building exercise with members of their staff should contact Bill.

A History Lesson: HEA *Part 3 in a 3 Part Series*

The part of the Higher Education Act that FSA staff members are most familiar with is Title IV. But Title IV has seen its share of changes since 1965 through reauthorizations mandated by Congress to take place every five years. FSA works on many parts of Title IV, such as Pell Grants, FFEL, Direct Loans and Perkins Loans.

These specific programs did not exist in the original Higher Education Act, but were developed in response to an increasing amount of students with "exceptional need" of organized federal aid.

One example of the changing Title IV is in the 1998 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. It increased the Pell Grant award, which had been capped at \$3,000 per year, to \$4,500 for the 1999-2000 academic year. For each school year until the 2002-2003 year, this amount increased in \$300 increments. For the 2003-2004 academic year, the amount increased \$400 to \$5,800.

We all know that FSA is the first performance-based organization, but some of us may not know where that honor came from. We became a PBO through Title I of the 1998 reauthorization. Title I took FSA out of the Office of Postsecondary Education and made it the first organization in government to focus on getting results. The rest, as they say, is history.

EXTRA! EXTRA!

The first-ever CIO Technology Update conference took place in Arlington, Va., last month. Nearly 80 attendees came to the conference, which was held at the Hilton Towers. Participants learned about several current topics in technology, such as XML, Web services at colleges and universities, e-authentication and more. Over 75 percent of the attendees gave the conference positive ratings and expressed hope that CIO will continue to offer similar events in the future.





MyFSA

My FSA talked with Kevin Black of the Students Channel about his work bringing student aid information to the community.

Q: How do you spread the word about financial aid?

A: Since 1996, I have established a very close relationship with guidance counselors. I would personally take materials to the schools, and guidance counselors would spread the word to teachers, parents, librarians, churches and high schools in the D.C. metropolitan area. I spread the word by attending events like college nights at libraries and education and job workshops at many high schools and churches.

Sometimes I brought materials to the parents' and students' houses. Everyone wanted a copy of the FAFSA form, Student Guide booklet and Funding Your Education booklet. During the last three years, I have been attending financial aid workshops at HD Woodson High School in D.C., Douglas High School and Oxon Hill High in Maryland, Southwest Library in D.C. and Oxon Hill Library in Maryland.

Q: What first inspired you to bring the work of FSA to your community?

A: My very first time of recognizing the need is when I would bring financial aid materials to Anacostia High School in D.C. We would provide guidance on understanding the financial aid process. Most of the students we were dealing with came from poor backgrounds and did not have much support from their parents. With the assistance of the guidance counselor and myself, at the end of the school year, at least 80 percent of the students we worked with were accepted into vari-

ous colleges.

When I first started conducting financial aid workshops six years ago, I realized quickly the need for this information in the community. Parents and students just wanted a better understanding of the entire financial aid process, so I try to break it down so they can understand and benefit from this process.

Q: Have you been able to see the impact of federal student aid on young adults in your community?

A: Yes, I have some students I had worked with three or four years ago that have graduated from college and currently have fantastic jobs. One of the former students has graduated from Lincoln University, Pa., and now she's working for the Department of Defense as an accountant, which was her major.

Q: How does taking such an active role in helping put America's students through school make you feel?

A: It's a rewarding and humbling feeling for me. I just want to give back to the community. Personally, it's a good feeling inside to know that you play a small positive part in the lives of many kids.

Q: Do you have any advice for other FSA staff who want to help spread the word about financial aid to their communities?

A: My only advice for the FSA staff is that the kids are our future, and we must help them pursue and achieve their educational dreams. Our country is depending on it!

It's a good feeling inside to know that you play a small positive part in the lives of many kids.

—Kevin Black

Coming Next Month...

Learn how customer service representatives are using eServicing to help students in our feature on Electronic Customer Relationship Management! That and more in the July issue of FSANow.